

## Unit 6: Gestures and Taboos

### Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

### Be aware of the following

- Importance of gesture/taboo knowledge for Russian linguists
- Helpful cross-cultural perspectives possessed by military personnel
- Necessity of personal restraint and effort to become culturally adept
- Universal cultural message of the smile
- Foundational attitudes helpful in dealing with Russian Federation peoples
- Greetings, gestures, and eating 'dos and taboos'
- Cautions military linguists should employ
- Negative media portrayals of current Russian Federation trends
- Importance of friendships within Russian society
- Alcohol practices in Russia
- Guidelines concerning demonstrative behavior and body language currently taking place in Russia
- Peculiarities concerning doorways to Russian business and living quarters
- Safety precautions to employ when going to Russia
- Importance of patience and endurance in deliberations with Russians
- Manners and customs related to Russian Orthodox practice
- Effects of politicization upon the Russian Bible

## Identify

- Ultimate gesture
- Polarized thinking
- Nyekulturno
- Mir, vranyo, "drug," znakomy and dacha
- Mafia
- Grozny
- Chechnya
- Chernobyl

## Realize

- Importance of humility, sincerity and restraint when working cross-culturally
- Overarching impact of history within the Russian Federation region
- Importance of family and friends in Russian society
- Refined culture of the Russian tradition
- Benefits of heartfelt discussion with Russian counterparts
- Importance of the collective, patience and authority within current Russian society
- Kitchen as a common gathering point for discussions within Russia
- High proportion of organized crime within Russian society today
- Impact of the religious revival in the Russian Federation
- Continuing impact of World War II on the collective Russian psyche

## Unit 6: Gestures and Taboos

*"You need to carefully orient your forces so that you don't end up being your own worst enemy simply out of cultural ignorance. Many times Russian soldiers made serious cultural errors in dealing with the Chechen civilians. Once insulted or mistreated, they became active fighters or supported the active fighters. Russians admit they underestimated the affect of religion on the conflict."*

-- Russian Army Lessons Learned from the Battle of Grozny, COL Henry A. Zimon, ODCSOPS

*"I think I saw the war [Vietnam] from a different perspective....It kind of shaped me in terms of the impact of the culture you're involved in, the environment you're involved in, and how important that is in making decisions on military operations."*

-- General Zinni, CENTCOM Commander, 27 Dec 1998

*"I love the people myself. I want to love them. And who could help loving them, our splendid Russian people, so simple in their greatness!"*

-- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, p. 59

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Manners, morals, customs and taboos--it is impossible to know all the elaborate and complex rules which govern interactions within a given society or culture. The task overwhelms.

The purpose here is not to rephrase guidance given in manners and customs texts. Rather, this section first outlines general perspectives military personnel can take in approaching a new culture. Then it treats common attitudes, greetings, gestures, eating practices and cautions to employ when dealing with Russian Federation peoples.

## I. General Perspectives

**1. Confidence** As members of the United States Armed Forces, we maintain a sensitivity to culture whenever we put on our uniforms.

Higher ranking officers receive salutes, a sign of respect due to their rank. Noncommissioned officers exert hands-on guidance and supervision. The titles, sergeant and petty officer suggest a different--though no less important--type of respect. These courtesies recognize varied cultures within the military.



Applied to dealing with peoples of other lands and societies, these same habits and respect for authority become invaluable.

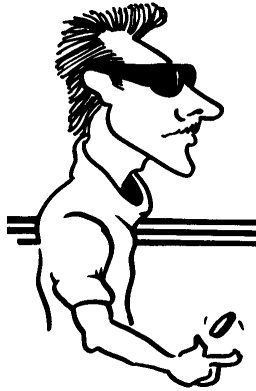
Desert Storm/Shield/Farewell authenticated the sensitive and knowledgeable cross-cultural abilities possessed by our armed forces personnel. More than 560,000 American servicemembers deployed to the theater. Customs and traditions of Saudi Arabia were drastically different than those of the United States.

Yet what happened during the deployment? Writes logistician Lt. Gen Pagonis in his account of the conflict, "Nothing."

*There was not a single incident of deliberate misconduct on the part of our service members...our soldiers showed great understanding and compassion...[They] demonstrated that they were smart, and talented, and flexible." (Moving Mountains, p. 228.)*

The Gulf conflict demonstrated the certainty that, when put to the test, training prepares airmen,

soldiers, sailors and marines to deal with sensitivities of other cultures.



**2. Restraint** T.E. Lawrence, British adventurer, writer and Arabist of the early 20th century, described this sense of tempered behavior. *"Keep always on your guard,"* wrote Lawrence, *"...be a little stiff at first."*

We may feel the best way to get along is to imitate, in some ways, the conduct of Russian peoples in order to be accepted. The safest course of action is often to imitate. The best approach however, is to restrain our impulsive, up front, forthright, let-it-all-hang-out behaviors.

Treating individuals as if they were entering our living rooms--by dispensing courtesy and grace--goes a long way to cement solid relations with others. Possessing a cautious and restrained demeanor--always observing and seeking to learn--does much to promote meaningful interaction. Recognizing the diverse, long-standing, tradition-bound nature of Russian cultures assists.

Harmony then comes in possessing a nonjudgmental frame of mind. Such restraint helps avoid actions which are shocking or insulting.

### 3. Wholehearted Effort

Adeptness at cross cultural communication comes only through dedicated observation, travel, study and concentrated energy. Often, what must take place cannot be learned from reading military manuals.

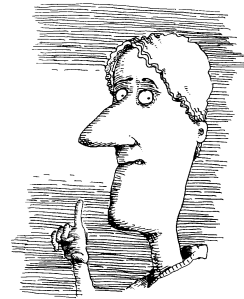


Says Captain Ross Coffman, when commander of F Troop, 2nd squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment,

while stationed at Camp Dobol, some 25 miles southeast of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, "what we need to do here is observe, and observe some more. See what's going on and say, 'Is this a police matter or is this a military matter?' You have to be aware of everything that's going on. And although you're restrained, you maintain an iron fist that you keep in your pocket." (Army Times, 17 Nov 1997, p. 15.)

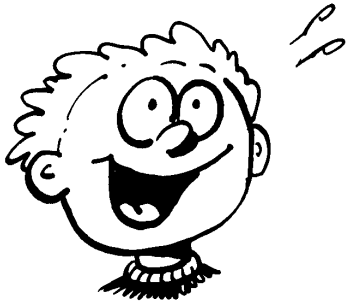
Or, as T.E. Lawrence wrote in a past generation,

*"Your success will be just proportioned to the amount of mental effort you devote to it."*



**4. The "Ultimate Gesture"** Business advisor Roger Axtell, in his book Gestures, The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World, describes this universal symbol. Called the "ultimate gesture," it is rarely misunderstood, releases positive energy, and assists in the most complicated of situations.

*"What is this singular signal, this miracle [manner], this giant of all gestures?*



*It is, quite simply, the smile.*

*Use it freely. Use it often." (p. 113.)*

## II. Overall Attitudes

*"...I feel that the Western media has failed to provide a balanced coverage of recent developments in Russia by amplifying the negative trends in Russia. For example, the mass media...has highlighted the extravagances of the nouveau riche, the civil war in Chechnya, smuggling of nuclear materials, the rise of the Mafia, official corruption, and the poor state of the Russian military. Not too many programs, however, have emphasized the more positive aspects of the developing situation in Russia.*

*As a result, many in the West remain fixated on the old Russia--TV images of Russian women waiting for a loaf of bread remain fresh in our minds--but more importantly, it has become fashionable to suggest that Russia is slowly becoming an anarchy with the Mafia filling the power vacuum caused by the weakening of central authority.*



*My own travels throughout the Russian Far East have shown that although life remains difficult for most Russians, the probability of anarchy remains very low, but to the contrary, there are more reasons for cautious optimism in Russia."*

--Major David Shin, U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer  
Report, 11 Aug 1997

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The following general approaches apply when dealing with peoples of the Russian Federation.

### 1. Recognize Long-standing Traditions of Refined Culture

Contribution to world class literature, technology, medicine, science and art are an integral part of the Russian tradition.

To concentrate only on current economic/political woes, or overlook the history of Russia's refined culture is to do her people a great disservice.

## 2. Practice Civility and Respect

**a. Manners** The Russian term "Nyekulturno" refers to an uncultured, bad mannered, wrong way to do something. A whole litany of casual actions, which many Americans take for granted, signifies someone who is "Nyekulturno" in Russian eyes. Linguists would be well advised to be aware of these practices, which are listed later in this chapter under the "Gestures" heading.



**b. Sensitivity** Though speaking of his mission within Bosnia, the following words of Company Commander Ross Coffman also apply to dealing with Russian counterparts.

*"Ordinarily, because we're all 'Type A' personalities, the first thing an American soldier does is charge into a situation...We take the objective, move to the screenline. Whatever."*

*I've changed [in Bosnia] in the fact that I try to observe the situation to find out what's going on...I apply the customs, the history of this area and respond from there." (Army Times, 17 Nov 1997, p. 15.)*

## 3. Show Kindness



Most cultures generously accept people who show consideration of others, who maintain fairness in clarifying their views, and who model a tolerant approach which seeks peace.



**4. Be Sincere** A kind, honest, humble approach--free of arrogance and an overbearing attitude--naturally opens the way for agreeable exchanges. Writes Arabic scholar Dr. Margaret Nydell,



*"Foreigners are forgiven a great deal--even conservative people make allowances, particularly when they know your motives are good. The essential thing is to make a sincere, well-meaning effort to adapt and understand."*  
(Understanding Arabs, p. 112.)

## 5. Friendship

**a. Importance** The word "drug" (droog) in Russian refers to a genuine friend, someone like a "bosom buddy." Over time and through many experiences, such friendships develop. You trust in, confide in and treat the other person like a member of your family. Openness and an all-encompassing acceptance characterize the relationship. When times are good or hard, your "drug" is there.

**b. Acquaintance** The Russian word "znakomy" refers to an acquaintance. It is not to be confused with "drug." Many Americans become acquainted with strangers quickly. Immediately, friendship ensues.

Yet compared to Russian counterparts, such "friendships" are often short lived, compartmentalized, focusing only on work, neighborhood or recreation activities. We hold others "at arm's length" when deep personal problems arise. Referrals to professional help, rather than personal involvement, are the norm.

Many Russians, on the other hand, treat friendships very intently. To some Americans, it may seem like "smothering," so strong is the involvement. A network of such individuals enables Russians to endure when times are hard.

## 6. Family

**a. Status** Though current ills--overcrowdedness, divorce, financial hardships, lack of privacy--affect the family institution, it is still a source of great stability for most Russians. To pull through tough times, Russians may turn to extended family members to find odd jobs. Young support the aged. Some 50 million **dachas** (country cabins or sheds) allow family members to enjoy a place of retreat and relaxation.

**b. Conversation** Many Russians value inquiries about children and their families. This genuine interest in sharing, when combined with a warm frankness concerning "matters of the heart" (personal joys and sorrows, successes and failures), goes a long way to establishing long-lasting relations.

## 7. Time and Patience

**a. Background** Historically, punctuality is not a Russian virtue. Though it is helpful for visitors to be on time for appointments, be prepared for delays and arrivals long after the appointed hour. An agrarian lineage, where time was measured by seasons, and a Communist heritage, which guaranteed jobs with little incentive for doing things on time, impacts activity today.

Many Russians are notoriously late. They value stamina and perseverance, rather than punctuality. Expect delays, often inexplicable or due to bureaucratic inefficiency, during most administrative tasks. Also, roundabout discussions, with customary small talk, refreshments, inquiries about family and personal issues may precede the actual business at hand.



**b. Contemplation** Reflection upon the historical, philosophical and ideological considerations of a task at hand all play in the Russian decision-making process. Consequently, deliberations require great patience by those more used to direct, action-oriented approaches.

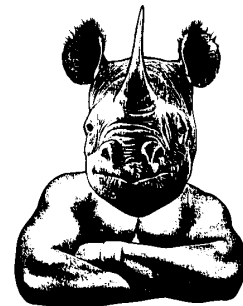
Delays and postponements may be commonplace. Yet, when decisionmakers use persistent patience, and the project is fully understood, many Russians can work with tremendous energy and industry to accomplish a task.

**8. Collective** Stemming from a tradition of the agricultural village commune (the "mir"), and the communal spirit of togetherness ("sobornost"), Russians place great emphasis upon the group as opposed to the individual. Everyone's business readily becomes everyone else's. Decision making, once in the hands of the Communist party, now may center more on the group rather than an executive alone.

## 9. Authority

**a. Teachers** From early on, Russian children are taught along semi-military lines, exhibiting great consideration for teachers, collective authorities, and the rules of the classroom. This sense of respect often borders on fear, especially as the age or status of the teacher/authority figure increases.

**b. Regulations** One way to emphasize the importance of authority is through regulation, regimentation and control. Within cities, uniformed militia enforce jaywalking and pedestrian laws, in addition to motor vehicle traffic laws.



**c. Dependency** The following insights, gathered from Foreign Area Officer trip reports to Russia, are helpful.

In November 1992, CPT Jin Robertson reported on the "dependency Russians have towards the government. In the past, the government had planned, managed and provided everyone with food, shelter and other necessities. This made competition in the economic sense almost unnecessary.

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*Now, under a democratic government, competition is almost the key to survival...even if Russia is technically a democratic society, a majority of the population is experiencing tremendous difficulty in giving up old ways of living and adjusting to the new way of life."*

*In October 1992, CPT Craig Agena wrote, "Compared to the cities and countryside that I visited in China, Russia is a lot worse off. Although political reform has taken shape, it is very apparent that the mindset of central control still persists at every level. After being in country for a couple of days, you begin to realize that money alone will not solve the problems of Russia."*

*In May 1995, MAJ Matthew Brand reported on changes he observed since a visit to Russia three years prior. After experiencing a six week in-country training program, MAJ Brand wrote, "I noticed a radical reduction in the degree of 'Soviet attitude' among Russian civilians and members of her military." Thus, given time, the climate of dependency may be changing.*

**10. Pessimistic Fatalism** Hope for a future better life is not a commonly projected attitude. A dispirited demeanor, which expresses frustration with daily life, may be widespread. This disheartening approach may mask an underlying buoyancy and optimism for life which many Russians possess but seldom show in public.



*Pride in "Mother Russia" abounds. Yet, a general feeling that she must take a different, often more dolorous path, is commonplace. Many feel that a unique history and social structure must develop the Russian "soul" in a manner entirely different from other countries and peoples.*

## 11. Alcohol

*"I try to find sympathy and feeling in drink...I drink so that I may suffer twice as much!"*

-- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, p. 13

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**a. Overview** Though per capita rates of alcohol consumption are similar between the United States and Russia, Russians drink much more hard liquor, like vodka and cognac. Drinking becomes the "measure of a person." To drink heavily, while maintaining clarity of thought and person, is highly valued.

Dinners and formal occasions often readily serve vodka, drunk straight down in small shot glasses by Russian hosts. Matching Russian counterparts in drinking often leads to sheer folly on the part of Americans. "Falling-down drunk" is not considered in good taste.

American military personnel would be wise to courageously determine beforehand their approach to toasting with and drinking alongside their Russian counterparts.



**b. Alcoholism** Foreign Area Officer MAJ David Shin points out that death rates in Russia rose in the late 1980s and increased sharply between 1992-1993. With the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, a stressful environment increased heart disease, stroke, violent death and alcoholism statistics.



Excess vodka consumption occasions many social vices, including absenteeism from work, low productivity, wife abuse, family problems, traffic accidents and lowered life expectancy rates.

### III. Greetings

*"The language study and preparation I received from DLI and graduate school were sufficient for any situation...Although the use of slang is still my weakest area, I became much more proficient in the 'street language' as a result of my many conversations with younger Russians and alleged members of the mob."*

-- MAJ Matthew Brand, Foreign Area Officer Report,  
9 May 1995

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**1. Handshakes** Direct eye contact with a good, firm handshake is a customary form of greeting. Polite phrases, such as "How do you do" or "How are you doing" are often omitted. A stating of one's name suffices.

#### 2. Demonstrative Behavior

**a. Welcome rites** Affection in public by Russians usually takes place only during times of greeting or parting. The "Russian bearhug," with accompanying kisses on alternate cheeks or the lips, may be common amongst friends and relatives.

**b. Physical contact** Within crowded conditions, Russians may shove, touch, push or use their elbows when competing with others for places. This is all in the course of events and is not to be taken personally. Men and women may hold hands when walking down the street. Touching the other person while talking may also occur.



**3. Gifts** Spontaneous gift giving is a Russian tradition. When invited to a home, the traditional Slavic gifts of bread and salt--the staples of life--are now replaced with flowers, food, or small items procured from the States. American souvenirs, with city, college, company or military motto, are especially welcome as are decorative pins.

## 4. Communication

**a. Home** Writes Foreign Area Officer MAJ Peter Martinson of his Feb 1997 visit to Russia, "...just sitting in the kitchen...with Russians and talking is a combined history, sociology, economic, political science and psychology lesson all rolled into one!"

Discussions taking place in the kitchen and home--a secure, relaxed and hospitable location--can be the center of social life.

Topics of family, children and life in the United States are especially fruitful. International relations, and the current economic conditions and changes taking place in Russia are also helpful subjects.



**b. "No"** The tendency in Russia is to respond with "no" rather than "yes." Do not be intimidated by this blunt response.

**c. Fibs** "Vranyo" (vran-YO), or a tendency to be less than straightforward with the facts, is ascribed to Russian communication patterns. Vranyo masters, who put the best possible spin on an embarrassing situation, are highly esteemed. Victims of vranyo may subtly acknowledge such activity is taking place, appreciate it for what it is worth, and then get on with business.

## IV. Gestures

*"...the U.S.S.R. is composed of 15 very diverse republics with strong cultural differences. As a result, certain gestures and body language may have local flavors and meanings."*

-- Roger E. Axtell, Gestures, The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World, p. 156

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### 1. Body Language

**a. Nyekulturno** The following gestures are, to many Russians, signs of ill manners.



**(1) Casual behavior in public** Like many Europeans and Asians, Russians believe that public behavior should be with propriety and respect. Avoid the following.

- **Overcoats** Wearing coats in public buildings or sitting on them in a restaurant. Check items in the cloakroom.
- **Pockets** Standing with hands in pockets or talking with older persons with arms folded across the chest
- **Posture** Slouching around in chairs
- **Feet** Putting feet on tables
- **Sitting** Crossing legs when seated to show sole of shoe, sitting with legs spread apart or with one ankle resting on the knee
- **Relaxing** Stretching and crossing arms in back of head



**(2) Manners** Some of what Americans take for granted is boorish to many Russians. Abstain from the following.



- **Gum** Eating, drinking or chewing gum during class
- **Parks** Eating lunch on urban park lawns
- **Slovenly attire** Sloppy dress at cultural events
- **Boisterousness** Loud talk and pushy behavior in public
- **Latrine** Saying you need to go to the restroom....simply excuse yourself.
- **Gaudy dress** Wearing less than conservative clothes for business or formal occasions
- **Whistling** Whistling indoors and at cultural events

**b. Symbolic actions** Be aware of meanings of the following common gestures.

- **"OK" sign** To some, it is a positive gesture; to others, obscene
- **Thumbs up** Usually indicates approval
- **Shaking the raised fist** Anger or disagreement
- **Passing in a theater aisle** When going in front of others to get to your seat, always pass by turning to face those whom you go in front of. Never show your back side to them.



- **Pointing with index finger** Though commonly done, it is improper
- **Counting** Many Russians bend (close) their fingers to count rather than opening them.
- **Lines** Pushing, shoving and elbowing in lines may be common. On the other hand, long, orderly lines of people patiently waiting are also regular occurrences.
- **Somberness in public** Many Russians, in cities like Moscow, may appear glum and unsmiling in public. In private, comfortable gatherings, a more open, friendly attitude prevails.



**2. Eating** The following is instructive concerning eating habits with Russian counterparts.

**a. Drinking** At more formal dinners, two bottles of liquid refreshment may be on the table, one of vodka, one water. Beware--an informal tradition is once the vodka bottle is opened, it must be consumed.

**b. Water** Drink only bottled water, rather than using water straight from the tap. This applies to brushing teeth also.

**c. Breakfast** Many Russians enjoy a large breakfast. Soup for lunch or dinner is common.

**d. Appetizers** (zakuski) It is traditional to have many appetizers at meals. Avoid eating too many and thus spoiling the main course.

**e. Cutlery** Many Russians eat with the fork in the left hand and knife in the right. Hands are generally kept out of the lap and above the table with wrists resting lightly on the table top.



**f. Washbasins** Most hand washbasins do not have plugs. This practice ensures that running water is used to wash hands, a practice believed by many to be very hygienic.

**g. Toasts** Raising glasses in a toast is serious business. Short speeches, rather than perfunctory words like "cheers" or "bottoms up," are the norm.

**h. Kitchen invites** Few better opportunities exist to get to know Russian counterparts than around the kitchen table. Consider it a great honor to be treated as "family" in this manner. Russian visitors may likewise feel honored to eat in American kitchens.

**3. Threshold** In Russian folklore, the doorway was considered the place of the house spirit. Consequently, to shake hands over the threshold became a sign of bad luck. Only when inside the door should handshakes be made.

Once inside the door, removal of shoes is appropriate, especially in inclement weather. Also, expect smoke once inside. Up to 70 percent of Russian adults smoke.



## V. Additional Manners and Customs

*"I have attempted to show that our image of Russia--drug dealers, gangsters, corrupt officials, poor pensioners--has been skewed, so much so that it leads us to conclude that the collapse of public order and eventual rise of a dictator is only a matter of time...I believe that Russia will succeed in dealing with these problems..."*

-- Foreign Area Officer MAJ David Shin, 11 Aug 1997

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**1. Safety** The impact of Western media often results in a disproportionate, sensational, sometimes hysterical understanding of the place criminal activity holds in the Russian Federation. But crime does remain a problem. The following is helpful to ensure personal safety.



**a. Precautions** Writes Foreign Area Officer CPT Raymond Millen,

*"As with any country in economic straits, crime is ever present. Dress down, secure your wallet/purse, keep valuables or excess money in the hotel safe, and divide up your money so that only a portion is pulled out for a sales transaction."*

Additional preventive measures include:

**(1) Attracting attention** In urban centers, avoid standing around, talking loudly in English, and drawing attention to yourself or your group.

**(2) Intoxication** Even if slightly inebriated, do not go out into public alone. Only with a trusted friend who remains sober should you venture into public while under the influence of alcohol. Non-Russians around nightclubs or bars are especially vulnerable to criminal activity.

**(3) Money** Keep cash and valuables located close to your body, in a secretive location. Fanny packs or waist packs are ripe for pickpocket activity.



**b. Safety tips** On 25 Nov 1992, Foreign Area Officer Jin Robertson filed the following report.

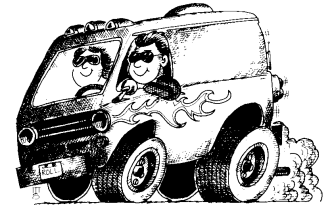
*"...the matter of safety seems to be a serious problem in Russia. Because of the economic troubles, street violence seems to have risen greatly. I heard that in the evenings most people are terrified of going outside, and I was constantly warned not to go out at night. They are fearful of being mugged and possibly even killed by mobs and gangs. The situation seemed to be worse for foreigners. As a result of foreigners' reputation as being rich, they seem to have become the prime target of outrageously high prices, theft, and also assault."*

The U.S. Department of State brochure entitled "Tips for Travelers to Russia and The Newly Independent States," gives the following helpful information.

**(1) Packing** *"Safety begins when you pack. Leave expensive jewelry, unnecessary credit cards, and anything you would hate to lose at home."*

**(2) Observe** *"Be vigilant on public transport and at tourist sites, food markets, flea markets, art exhibitions, and all places where crowds gather...Members of religious and missionary groups have been robbed by people pretending to be interested in their beliefs...Pickpocketings, assaults and robberies occur both day and night. Be aware of your surroundings..."*

**(3) Taxis** "Avoid hailing unmarked cars as taxis. Although this is a common practice in the Newly Independent States, foreigners have been robbed and assaulted by the drivers of such unmarked cabs. Never accept a ride from a driver who already has other passengers."



**(4) Travel** "Crime aboard trains has also increased. For example, travelers have been victimized without their knowledge and robbed on the train from Moscow to St. Petersburg. Crimes such as armed robbery have also been reported on trains between Moscow and Warsaw and between Moscow and Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. On some trains, thieves have been able to open locked compartment doors."

**c. Automobiles** CPT Raymond Millen makes the following observation in his FAO report of May 1993. "As a pedestrian be aware that automobiles have the right of way and will not avoid hitting you. Automobiles may even drive onto the sidewalk if it is convenient. When in doubt, follow the lead of Russian pedestrians."

**d. Water** CPT Raymond also reports, "Bring bottled water with you, even for brushing your teeth, since the water quality is questionable even in the best hotels."

**2. Mafia** Writes Yale Richmond in his book From Nyet to Da (p. 79), "...it is difficult for [Americans] to imagine the level of Mafia crime and violence in Russia...the Mafia has replaced the Communist Party by providing 'order' in Russia."



Foreign Area Officer MAJ Matthew Brand's observations (9 May 1995) support this assessment.

*"Corruption in the system is a given and everyone admits that a new enterprise can neither begin nor survive without regular payments to the mob. Extortion from street vendors was commonplace. Even successful businessmen from the 'nouveau riche,' who are making a great deal of money, acknowledged that dealing with elements of organized crime is a part of doing business."*

The term "Mafia" carries broad connotations for most Russians, however. Legitimate entrepreneurs and other financially successful people are the "Mafia," as well as hoodlums and extortionists.



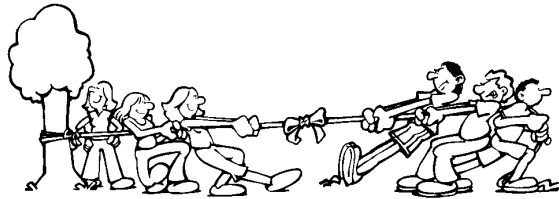
Foreign Area Officer David Shin goes so far as to state (11 Aug 1997), "...when Russians refer to someone as a member of the "Mafia" they also include small and big businessmen because they maintain regular contacts with criminal gangs who protect them...big businessmen...who have an army of private bodyguards--approximately 800,000 bodyguards were employed in 1995--are involved in criminal activity, albeit some of their activities are legal, because it is too difficult to do business in Russia without being involved in crime."

**3. Negotiating** When conferring with Russians, and working out solutions to tedious problems, patience and endurance should be uppermost. Some Russians may engage in walkouts, use threats, and show temper tantrums. During negotiations, such behavior is almost a "given." Russians respect candidness, "hard nosed" and straightforward talk, when facts can back it up.

**4. Shopping** Drawn from Foreign Area Officer reports, the following information provides insight into shopping within the Russian Federation.

**a. Overview** "In general, the act of shopping in stores is very inconvenient and tedious. Access to displays is cramped and since there are no signs indicating item locations, shoppers must wander about until they find the desired product.

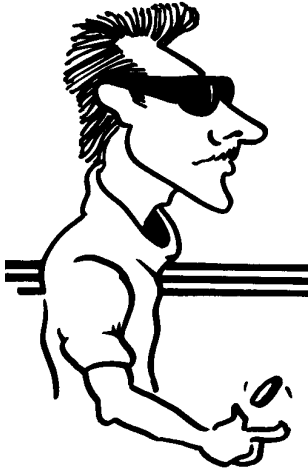
In food stores the shopper must first select an item from the display counter, receive a ticket, move across the store to pay a cashier, and with the receipt, return to the original display to pick-up the item: a system which places higher value on employing numbers than on efficiency" (CPT Raymond Millen, May 1993).



**b. Bartering** "...you have to bargain hard--too many Western tourists just get taken for a ride. Of course, it helps to speak Russian. My favorite tactic, when the local sellers would invariably quote prices in dollars in...English, was to ask right away, in Russian, 'Aren't we in Russia here, friend? Aren't you proud of your language and currency? Let's talk rubles.' It seemed to work on their sense of Russian honor, and on better prices, too" (CPT Martin Chadzynski, Oct 1997).

**c. Rubles** "Try to purchase all goods and services in rubles through local acquaintances while in Russia. Many Russian goods and services are priced in two tiers: rubles for locals and dollars or yens for foreigners. Since these prices are not converted according to official exchange rates, prices in dollars or yen could mean 25 or 30 times more than the prices in rubles for the same product" (CPT Jin Robertson, Nov 1992).





**d. Item availability** *"Don't expect to buy daily health care items in Russia. Because of this it is prudent to bring everything you will need with you. The hotels do have small stores where you can buy with hard currency some items but stock is unpredictable and prices are outrageous. Many everyday items make great gifts...Everything Western is desirable. I was offered money for pens, pants, jacket and even an empty [soft drink] can I bought in the currency store at the hotel"* (CPT Stephen Town, Apr 1992).

**5. Religion** In addition to topics treated in the "Russian Orthodox Religious History" unit, awareness of the ensuing observations concerning Russian Orthodox practice assists.

**a. Russian Orthodox distinctives** Orthodoxy is not just a 'displaced cousin' of the Roman Catholic Church. Though related in many areas, orthodoxy is a distinct development, with its own traditions, worship and history of interaction with the larger culture.

Throughout a continuous history from apostolic times, a history involving persecution, intrigue, and regional interaction, a set liturgy maintained the church's identity. Thus, a bias for tradition affects most associations involving orthodox thought and practice.

**b. Russian identification** Ronald Hingley in The Russian Mind (p. 130) describes the psychological relief offered by the church to a peasant's drab environment.

Historically the peasant "found his dull, hard, featureless everyday life vastly enriched by the candles, the icons...the antique liturgy, the vestments, the onion domes, the music of his church services...Religion was thus, to the average pre-Revolutionary villager, an element without which life was barely thinkable. It was also indissolubly fused with the idea of Russianness."

FAO Martin Chadzynski, in describing Moscow (Oct 1997), shows how this fusion of Church and Russian identity takes place in structural make-up. "The most noticeable architectural detail in Moscow, immediately visible even that first evening, is the large number of Orthodox churches, most that survived somehow, others already rebuilt, all over Moscow. It's obvious the City and State governments have made full Church restoration an immediate priority. It gives the city a certain pleasing color that must have been lacking during the Soviet night."

**c. Religious revival** In Aug 1991, FAO Stephen Town traveled to Khabarovsk (kah-BAHR-ahfsk), a junction station city of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Khabarovsk contains over one-half million people, and is located in Southeast Russia (Asia). Though not indicative of all of the Russian Federation, his findings concerning Orthodox Church renewal enlighten.

"On our final Sunday, I walked to the local Russian Orthodox Church in Khabarovsk where there was a line for about two blocks. I went to get in the line up but was escorted to the gate and then inside the church. I obviously looked like a guest. The young [clergy person] that escorted me spoke some broken English and explained that the line was for those wanting to join the church through baptism.



The church has four services each Sunday morning and about 500 attend each service. There were no seats so everyone stood for the entire service, which lasted for about an hour.

The building was divided into three sections with the main services being held in the center, which was the largest area. On one side there was a prayer room that was full of older women standing shoulder to shoulder and praying. On the other side the baptisms were being conducted. [The Church was] only allowed to

*baptize on Sundays and [was] baptizing about 2000 people each Sunday. Most of those being baptized were young people from about 15 to 30 years old, but there were older and younger ones as well.*

*We had asked our guide about the resurgence of religion in the country and she said that she thought it was just a fad, but from what I saw that day, I believe that the church will soon be a major force in the country again, despite the efforts of the Communists to wipe it out."*

**d. Bible translations and distribution** Within Russian Orthodoxy (and Christianity in general in Russia), Bible translation and distribution projects can be volatile, politicized issues.

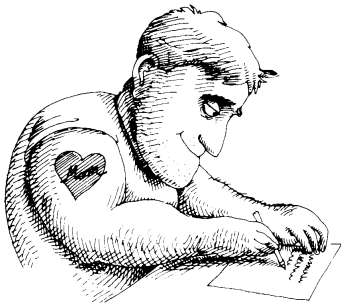
Many Protestant Americans welcome new translations and paraphrases of the Scriptures--the more the better. On military-to-military or support and stability operations with Russian counterparts, United States Armed Forces personnel willingly distribute Russian Bibles to promote harmony and demonstrate witness.

As pointed out however, by Stephen Batalden in a chapter entitled "The Contemporary Politics of the Russian Bible--Religious Publication in a Period of Glasnost," (Seeking God, pp. 232-243), military personnel would do well to be aware of the following reasons for the politicization of the Russian Bible.



**(1) Approach to spirituality** Historically, adherents of Russian Orthodoxy fulfilled their religious requirements without reading the Bible. Observing the church calendar with its fasts, saints' lives, icons and joining in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist were the important matters. Bible reading and study took a distant second place in Orthodox thought and practice.

**(2) Russian Orthodox Church Control** Until 1991, the Russian Orthodox church controlled sales of the Scriptures in the former Soviet Union. A Patriarchal and Synodal Bible Commission, tied to the Moscow Patriarchate, published an endorsed Bible complete with imprimatur upon the text. To have many different Bible translations in existence undermines historic church supervision and control.



**(3) Personal translations** In response to public demand, private, semiofficial translation projects exist. Many of these translations use conflicting Greek and Hebrew texts as their original sources. A confusing picture results. Church practice, authority, and oversight are damaged. Independent and competing Bible Societies and commissions add to the disarray.

**(4) Uneasiness with change** Russian Orthodox hierarchy practices an innate conservatism and desire to preserve tradition. In a manner not unlike that of King James Bible controversies in American Christianity, Russian Orthodox leadership feels new translations cloud the beauty of phrase and expression of older texts.

**(5) Lack of linguistic norm** In addition, though imprimaturs exist, there is no one linguistic norm for common Russian religious texts. A nostalgia for the past--with secure religious and language patterns--becomes increasingly valued.

**e. Uniate Orthodox Catholic Churches of the Ukraine** Due to historical and theological practice differences, special sensitivity is required of all who would deal with Uniate, Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic issues.

## 6. World War II Memory Most

Russians have a more intense understanding of World War II than many Americans. Schools rigorously teach major events and issues of the conflict. The destruction wrought by the Nazis took decades to rebuild. Hardly a family did not lose a member in the Great Patriotic War. War cemeteries, monuments and battlefields abound. Thus, its memory continues. It is the custom of newly married couples to go to a war cemetery and lay wreaths to commemorate the dead.



**7. Military** Many news accounts depict the disturbing, faltering state of Russia's military. The following material, gathered from FAO reports and a Russian Army Lessons Learned in Grozny report, shed further light on conditions today.

**a. Respect** *"The military is no longer viewed with the respect it has enjoyed in the past. Many of those with whom I spoke had fathers in the military. While they harbored no resentment towards their parent, they did not view the military as a viable career option. The problems with pay in the military are widely known...I found no strong feelings toward veterans in any particular age group"* (MAJ Matthew Brand, May 1995).



### b. Turmoil

**(1) Long-standing decline** *"The evidence shows that the Russian military had been faced with severe problems for several decades, such as desertion, alcoholism, lack of funds for training, and low morale—not just since the fall of Communism"* (Brand).

**(2) Monetary woes** "Militarily, Russia is experiencing great difficulty, and the source of the problem is money. The military does not have the funds to take care of its soldiers, period.

First, it does not have adequate housing for its professional soldiers, and this has led to low morale and increases in suicide rates, even among the officer corps.

Second, Russia lacks the resources to maintain its equipment, and it has no fuel to train its pilots and maneuver units. It has severely degraded the military's ability to generate combat power.

Third, the government cannot even pay its soldiers, and in Vladivostock (vla-dah-vah-STAHK), it has caused 600 officers to resign their commissions.

In sum, this means that the forces in the Russian Far East that comprise 16 divisions, approximately 70 surface ships and 900 combat aircraft, are not combat capable.



As a result, Russia poses a quantifiable threat in terms of the number of tasks and aircraft, but qualitatively, it no longer poses a significant threat conventionally. Unless the economy improves dramatically, I believe the military will remain a paper tiger for the foreseeable future" (Brand).

### **c. Russian Army Lessons Learned--Grozny**

Conflict in the Russian Federation Republic of Chechnya took place during 1994 and 1995. From the war between rebels and the Russian Army comes this Russian Army Lessons Learned--Grozny report. Grozny, the Chechen capital, is the center of the battlefield activity. The lessons learned give cultural insight into the manners and customs within the Russian Federation Army today. In addition, it sensitizes us all to the rigors of urban, unconventional warfare and the seriousness of our calling as members of our nation's Armed Forces.

**(1) Culture's importance** Though stated previously in this unit, the following quote is repeated for emphasis.

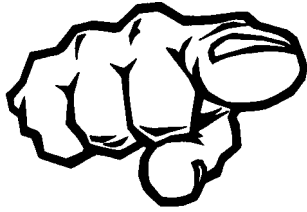
*"You need to culturally orient your forces so that you don't end up being your own worst enemy simply out of cultural ignorance. Many times Russian soldiers made serious cultural errors in dealing with the Chechen civilians. Once insulted or mistreated, they became active fighters or supported the active fighters. Russians admit they underestimated the affect of religion on the conflict."*



**(2) Ambiguous battlefield** "You need some way of sorting out the combatants from the non-combatants. The days of uniforms and organized units is over...boundaries between units were still tactical weak points, but it wasn't just horizontal boundaries they had to worry about. In some cases, the Chechens held the third floor and above, while the Russians held the first two floors and sometimes the roof...Entire battles were fought through floors, ceilings, and walls without visual contact."

**(3) Urban combat** "The psychological impact of high intensity urban combat is so intense that you should maintain a large reserve that will allow you to rotate units in and out of combat..."

According to a survey of over 1300 troops, about 72 percent had some sort of psychological disorder. Almost 75 percent had an exaggerated startle response. About 28 percent had what was described as neurotic reactions, and almost 10 percent had acute emotional reactions..."



#### (4) Discipline and training

*"Discipline and training are paramount. You can accomplish nothing without them. You may need to do training in the combat zone. Discipline must be demanded. Once it begins to slip, the results are disastrous..."*

*In less than a month, almost 20 percent of the Russian soldiers were suffering from viral hepatitis (very serious, very debilitating, slow recovery). Most had chronic diarrhea and upper respiratory infections that turned to pneumonia easily. This was blamed on the breakdown of logistical support that meant units had to drink contaminated water. Unit sanitary discipline broke down almost completely."*

#### (5) Information flow

*"The Russians were surprised and embarrassed at the degree to which the Chechens exploited the use of cell phones, Motorola radios, improvised TV stations, light video cameras, and the Internet to win the information war."*

#### (6) Weaponry

*"Rocket propelled grenade launchers were shot at everything that moved. They were fired at high angle over low buildings and from around buildings with little or no attempt made to aim..."*

*Not only were the Russians faced with well-trained, well-equipped Chechen military snipers, there were also large numbers of designated marksmen who were very good shots using standard military rifles."*



#### (7) Infantry training

*"The Russians reiterated the need for large numbers of trained Infantrymen. They said that some tasks, such as conducting logpack operations, could only be conducted by Infantrymen, the logistical unit soldiers being hopelessly inept and falling easy prey to the Chechens."*



**(8) Tactics** *"The most common response by the Chechens to the increasingly powerful Russian indirect and aerial firepower was hugging the Russian unit. If the hugging tactics caused the Russians to cease artillery and air fires, it became a man-to-man fight and the Chechens were well equipped to win..."*

*Chechens weren't afraid of tanks and BMPs. They assigned groups of rocket propelled grenade gunners to fire volleys at the lead and trail vehicles. Once they were destroyed, the others were picked off one-by-one...*



*Russians were surprised by the sophistication of the Chechen use of booby traps and mines. Chechens mined and booby trapped everything, showing excellent insight into the actions and reactions of the average Russian soldier. Mine and booby trap awareness was hard to maintain...*

*Ambushes were common. Sometimes they actually had three tiers. Chechens would be underground, on the ground floor, and on the roof. Each group had a different task in the ambush."*

**(9) Laws of War** *"Chechens were brutish, especially with prisoners..." (Russian Lessons learned from Battle of Grozny, COL Henry Zimon, 20 March 1998).*

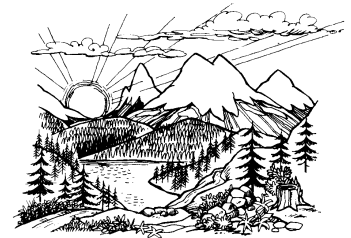
**d. American Missing in Action (MIA) personnel** *"To date [May 1993], the MIA group has uncovered no evidence of any American survivors. Concerning the Korean War prisoners, evidence suggests that none survived internment. Most stories concerning Vietnam War American prisoners have been propagated by swindlers seeking money in exchange for information and sensationalized by the press seeking a story" (CPT Raymond Millen FAO report).*

**8. Environment** The April 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster helped focus the world's attention on the poor ecological state of Russia's environment. Coit Blacker, Stanford University professor and former National Security Council director, goes so far as to say the Russian Federation now is a "toxic waste dump," so extensive is industrial harm to the environment.

FAO officer Raymond Millen expresses the magnitude of this corrosion. *"One of the great residual effects of the old regime which will continue to haunt the Commonwealth of Independent States is the extensive ecological damage..."*

*Within Moscow alone are 50 known radioactive disposal sites. The navy used to dispose of its nuclear submarine reactors in the ocean...until the international community caught them and demanded a halt to such activities. Currently the navy possesses over 200 nuclear submarines whose reactors they feel are too expensive to dispose of ecologically" (May 1993).*

On the other hand, anyone who has seen the movie Dr. Zhivago realizes the beauties of the Russian countryside. Writes FAO CPT Craig Akena, *"...the train ride from Vladivostock to Khabarovsk brought to light how beautiful and rich this country is in untapped natural resources" (Oct 1992).*



**9. China** Effects of the Mongol invasions, occurring over some 700 years ago, still linger in Russia's general suspicion of China. Perhaps just knowing over one billion people reside outside your borders also fosters such uneasiness. Whatever the reasons, comparisons of Russia with China bring out gut level, negative reactions in many Russian peoples.

## Review Quiz: Gestures and Taboos



### Part 1--Multiple Choice

Place the most correct response in the blank provided.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ What traits are necessary to establish strong alliances with people of other cultures?
  - a. Assertive assurance and domineering confidence
  - b. Wholehearted effort and unremitting study
  - c. Apologetic attitudes and condescending outlooks
2. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Roger Axtell, the ultimate gesture positively recognized most everywhere in the world, is the
  - a. frown.
  - b. firm handshake.
  - c. smile.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Adeptness at cross cultural communication comes best through
  - a. reading military manuals.
  - b. dedicated observation, travel, study and concentrated energy.
  - c. knowing American culture thoroughly. After all, isn't American popular culture known the world over?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Foreign Area Officer MAJ David Shin, U.S. media coverage of Russia is
  - a. balanced and objective, showing an appreciation for long-standing Russian cultural institutions and practices.
  - b. fixated on the old Russia---bread lines and corruption---and amplifies many negative trends in the society.
  - c. obsessed with Russian ballet and the practice of winter ice fishing of the Volga river.

## Unit 6: Gestures and Taboos

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5. \_\_\_\_\_ Most cultures generously accept people who
- a. wear designer jeans and listen to reggae music.
  - b. show consideration, maintain fairness, and model a tolerant, peace-seeking approach.
  - c. know a little of the language and history of the region visited.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Concerning time, many Russians value
- a. punctuality.
  - b. stamina and perseverance.
  - c. wristwatch digital alarms and "snooze" radios.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Regarding alcoholic toasts and drinking with Russian counterparts, American military personnel would be wise to
- a. courageously determine beforehand what the "rules of engagement" concerning drinking will be.
  - b. compete with Russian hosts in vodka drinking contests, as "face" is maintained and camaraderie established in getting "falling-down, dead drunk."
  - c. not touch a drop of strong drink.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ If pushed or shoved by Russian people while in a crowded line or waiting area, be prepared
- a. for a fight as this is an out of the ordinary happening.
  - b. to take such action in the normal course of events---it happens often.
  - c. for a personal altercation---someone doesn't like your attitude.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Many Russians tend to respond with \_\_\_\_\_ when asked an opinion, question or indicator of their feeling.
- a. yes
  - b. no
  - c. maybe
10. \_\_\_\_\_ When standing while talking with older Russian citizens, a good practice to employ is
- a. have hands in your pockets or arms folded across the chest.
  - b. adopting an attitude of propriety and respect.
  - c. tell them immediately your opinions on the current state of the Russian Army.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ A good safety precaution to take with money in Russia is to
- a. keep it in a fanny/waist pack.
  - b. divide it up in small amounts, place the majority in a platoon safe, and carry the rest in a secretive location next to your body.
  - c. flash large wads of American dollars to Russian friends, knowing they'll protect you from gangsters.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ When traveling in Russia, a good transportation practice to follow is
- a. hitch a ride at a local truck stop as Russian truckers enjoy talking to Americans.
  - b. keep your eyes open for an unmarked cab---they're reasonable and friendly.
  - c. enlist a regular taxi which has no other passengers.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Concerning traffic laws in Russia, \_\_\_\_\_ have the right of way.
- a. automobiles
  - b. pedestrians
  - c. bicycles
14. \_\_\_\_\_ In Russia, the term "Mafia" refers to
- a. hoodlums and extortionists alone.
  - b. financially successful people, legitimate businessmen, and gangster extortionists.
  - c. anyone with excessive money.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ When conducting problem solving discussions or handling disagreements, what trait is helpful to keep in mind?
- a. Fight fire with fire
  - b. Practice patience and perseverance
  - c. Use effusive and flattering talk
16. \_\_\_\_\_ When shopping in Russia, it is best to use \_\_\_\_\_ when paying for goods purchased.
- a. rubles
  - b. American dollars
  - c. Monopoly money

## Unit 6: Gestures and Taboos

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17. \_\_\_\_\_ Russian Orthodoxy is inevitably fused with the idea of \_\_\_\_\_ in the minds of many Russian Federation citizens.
- a. out-of-date religion
  - b. Russianness
  - c. Soviet corruption
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Great sensitivity should be taken when discussing similarities between Russian Orthodoxy and \_\_\_\_\_
- a. Ukrainian Uniate Orthodox churches.
  - b. Cossack Old Believer practice.
  - c. Russian Baptists.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ The decline of Russia's military readiness has occurred \_\_\_\_\_
- a. since the fall of Communism.
  - b. over the past few decades.
  - c. immediately after World War II but rebounded quickly and remains at a constant, ready-to-go-to-war state.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ One of the Russian Army's lessons learned from Grozny was \_\_\_\_\_
- a. Chechens were paralyzed by Russian tanks and BMPs.
  - b. urban warfare is difficult but with tanks and rocket grenade launchers, anyone can be successful.
  - c. Chechen military snipers and tactics showed they were well-trained and well-equipped personnel.



**Part 2--Fill in the Blanks** Fill in the blanks with the most correct word immediately following each section. Not all words listed will be used.

The term (1)\_\_\_\_\_ refers to an uncultured, bad mannered, wrong way to do something. The word (2)\_\_\_\_\_ refers to

someone who is a close friend, sort of like a "bosom buddy."

(3)\_\_\_\_\_ refers to an acquaintance.

A country (4)\_\_\_\_\_, or cabin/shed, is a place for retreat for many Russian families. Traditions of the (5)\_\_\_\_\_, an agricultural village commune, impact the current Russian tendency to value the collective rather than the individual. (6)\_\_\_\_\_ refers to the Russian communal spirit of togetherness.

A dispirited demeanor, expressing a (7)\_\_\_\_\_ towards the future, often masks an underlying buoyancy and optimism for life possessed by many Russians. The (8)\_\_\_\_\_ is a center for Russian family social life.

The word (9)\_\_\_\_\_ describes a tendency to be less than straightforward with the facts, a putting the best possible "spin" on an issue.

The (10)\_\_\_\_\_ is the traditional place of a "house spirit" in Russian folklore.

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drug	hoo-ah!
aspirin	western bar
mir	Znakomy
kitchen table	village pub
threshold	pantry
sobornost	
dacha	
nyekulturno	
Woodstock	
gathering	
pessimistic	
Fatalism	

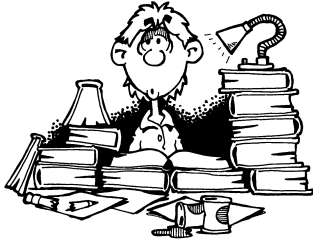
vranyo

**Part 3--True/False** Place a T or an F in the blank provided.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ According to Lt. Gen. Pagonis, Chief of Logistics during Desert Storm, soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines showed sensitive and knowledgeable cross-cultural abilities while deployed during the recent Middle East conflict.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Impulsive, up-front, let-it-all-hang-out behavior contributes to good cross-cultural interaction.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Establishing solid relations with friends from other cultures comes by treating individuals as if they were entering our living rooms--dispensing courtesy and grace all along.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Russian Army lessons learned from the Battle of Grozny indicate that the Russians were fully aware of religion's importance and impact on the war in Chechnya.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Since Russia currently has extensive economic difficulties, it is best to ignore her history of refined culture.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ To some Americans, the intensity of Russian friendships may seem like "smothering" so strong is the involvement.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Once a project is fully understood, many Russians can work with enormous energy and industry to finish the mission.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ In the Russian Soviet traditions, teachers are viewed by students as good natured coaches and mentors.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Furtive glances and weak handshakes are best to use when greeting Russian counterparts.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Smoking cessation campaigns are popular in Russia, bringing the percentage of smokers down to a level close to that of the United States.





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## Unit 6: Gestures and Taboos

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"One further point I'd make about the people is that what I tell the Fleet when I go around the world and talk to Sailors is that as the Chief of Naval Operations, and for the entire leadership of the United States Navy, the number one priority we have is them--it's you Navy folks. You are number one. The way I describe it is, every decision I make in Washington, I try to embed right in the middle of that decision, the impact it's going to have on our Sailors. That helps me keep perspective on what's really important."

Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jay Johnson, 20 Oct 1997

